

City of Rockville Commission on the Environment
June 10, 2008 Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Faith Klareich (FK), Seth Adams (SA), David Davis (DD), Kris Dighe (KD), Beri Kravitz (BK), and Geoff Sanders (GS).

Absent: Steve Cardon (SC), Michelle Clark (MC) and Tolulope Odunlami (TO).

Also in attendance: Staff Liaison Nate Wall (NW).

1. Welcome, News and Agenda Review

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 pm in the Blue Crab Room at Rockville City Hall.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

KD moves to approve May 13th meeting minutes as written; DD seconds. Unanimous approval of May 13th meeting minutes.

3. Green Building Policy Recommendations Process

DD feels that more information could be gained from the stakeholders if questions were sent out to them – Environment Commission (EC) could meet to specifically generate these questions.

SA was curious as to the proposed scope of the EC recommendations: the stakeholders intoned that the entire industry needed to be fixed top to bottom for green buildings to really be successfully integrated into “business as usual” – the EC will likely not propose such drastic measures?

GS mentioned that we have to consider the recently adopted policies of surrounding Montgomery County – if they require something that we don’t, it might make Rockville an anomaly within the County.

NW briefly explained Montgomery County’s adopted program with LEED requirements for buildings >10,000 square feet. Also, mentioned the stair-step approach that DC had adopted to increase building performance every few years, as well as Arlington County’s successful incentives-based system.

FK asked for volunteers from the Commission to meet again and flesh out these issues. SA, GS and possibly BK will attend. FK to ask whether SC, MC or TO are available.

Timeline is for EC to have their recommendations together by August.

NW to send out his draft internal memo on the green building program as well as other relevant information to small group for use at their green building planning meeting.

FK mentioned that the EC recommendations might be for phased implementation – e.g., staffing up for expedited permitting first before requirements kick in.

July’s EC meeting agenda to be predominantly devoted to green building discussion.

4. Greater Role for Environment Commission

SA mentioned he had read an article in the Gazette that stated during the Mayor & Council’s retreat, there was mention of expanding the role of the Environment Commission.

FK explained that the EC was perhaps going to be involved in more of a decision-making capacity, similar to the Planning Commission or Historic District Commission. Beyond that, it would be good to get the EC “into the loop” – the EC has been chasing after information for years, and you can’t ask questions about what you don’t know about.

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BK asked about reviving the concept of having EC liaisons to other Boards and Commissions. FK hoped that we could do better than that – can perhaps make it policy that the EC is involved in certain types of City business or projects, so that information would come directly before the EC rather than the EC having to spread out to get it.

DD asked if it was possible to get on the mailing lists of some of the other Boards and Commissions. NW to check on it.

FK mentioned that would need to determine what types of thresholds would require EC input – project magnitude, certain dollar amount, etc. Once past this threshold, it should have an environmental review by the EC. May be writing in aspects of Zoning Ordinance that would require an EC review.

NW advised that we want to make sure that an EC review is not a disincentive for “green” projects – we don’t want to make it “harder” to do good projects by adding an extra step. A better concept is making traditional (i.e., “not green”) projects justify why they AREN’T green – add an additional step for those projects.

KD mentioned that the EC has been largely playing a proactive role, and this would be moving us into a reactive role. We wouldn’t want to limit the review to projects identified as having environmental components however – it may take the environmental review to determine which projects do in fact have environmental elements to consider. Also, the EC may wish to create additional working groups – particularly an Energy group.

NW mentioned that several municipalities have set up “Energy Commissions” that approve City utility budgets, review spending on fuel, electricity, etc. and advise on efficiency.

FK brought up an example from Zoning – “solar rights”. The EC could possibly make calls of this nature, if development trees, etc. on one lot interfere with the ability of another lot to have operational photovoltaic panels, for example. Perhaps there are parking issues that could be brought to the EC in terms of limiting impervious area.

FK wondered about the status of the EC comments on the zoning ordinance – although they were comments on an older version, were those comments also forwarded to the Mayor & Council for their review, or should the EC resubmit comments based on the Planning Commission draft? NW to check on it.

NW also mentioned the possibility of having the EC be the deciding body on awarding grants/matching City funds for Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater management techniques on private lots (rain barrels, rain gardens, green roofs, etc). Similarly, if the City chooses to implement a program that assists in paying for home energy audits, or energy efficiency improvements, the EC could review individual applications and decide how to award any funds set aside for this purpose.

SA said that involvement in the future green building program seemed like an obvious fit.

FK asked all Commissioners to submit any additional ideas or criteria on EC involvement to her via email.

5. Working Group Updates

Outreach Working Group

DD said that the last meeting of the Outreach Group was a “get back on track” meeting – the group had been involved in so many special events recently (green building stakeholder meeting, Science

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Day) that they had not been working on their core projects. Would like to start recruiting for all working groups by getting emails out to community email lists, get information up on the website, Rockville Reports, newsletters, billboards.

NW to get list of communities with email lists such as West End, King Farm, TCA, etc. to the Community Outreach Working Group.

FK also mentioned that the Chamber of Commerce might have interested members.

DD said the group also talked about Science Day recommendations for next year, and reinvigorated the booth/road show concept. Are working on developing content.

NW said that the Community Outreach Group could meet with Graphics to help develop the materials – probably best to have the factual content ready to provide them at the meeting, and then discuss what the Group would like to see in terms of graphics.

Watershed Protection Working Group

KD mentioned that the group had a great first cleanup, with 10 adults and 3 children participating. Estimated approximately 12 bags of trash before wrapping up early due to tornado warning and severe thunderstorms.

KD mentioned that there would be another cleanup in the Fall, and that they would like to continue dialogue with Burgundy Estates to have a joint effort, and interest them in stream monitoring.

NW to get names and contact info of Adopt-A-Stream participants to the Watershed Protection Working Group for outreach purposes.

Also, the Group may be interested in getting a tour of the Water Treatment Plant – NW to look in to availability of a tour.

High Performance Building Working Group

SA and GS mentioned that the group had postponed the meeting last month.

6. Staff Updates

NW mentioned that the Environmental Management Division (EMD) had been working to create new educational content for the website. NW had sent out a link to the “hidden” content that is not yet public – Commissioners can review and give comments to NW.

The final draft of the Zoning Ordinance was released by the Planning Commission. This has now gone to the Mayor & Council, who will be holding meetings and public hearings on this for most of June, into July.

Mark Charles presented the Commercial Recycling Ordinance to Mayor & Council. It is expected that, D&I and adoption will occur concurrently at a Mayor & Council meeting in the end of July.

Lastly, NW announced that EMD was moving out of City Hall to 30 Courthouse Square in July. Future EC meetings may be held there, depending upon the parking situation.

7. Summer Meeting Dates

Discussed whether July 8th or July 15th would work best – will send out email to ask. August 10th sounds like it may work for everyone – will send out email query.

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8. Previously Tabled Items – Anti-Graffiti Ordinance

KD showed a brief slideshow of some pictures of gang-related graffiti he had photographed in Rockville. Additional discussion on recommendations for an anti-graffiti ordinance to be scheduled for a following meeting.

9. Wrap-Up and Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm.